

THE YEARS WITH DAD

JOHN M. POLHEMUS

6499 S. Kline Ct., Littleton, Colorado 80127

My father is John Polhemus, and I share his name. He is at once one of the most intelligent, productive and difficult people I have ever known. I would not wish him to be any other way. I am very much like my father. I believe in hard work, quality of life and excellence. I learned these values largely because of his efforts to make sure I understood their importance.

The following is a list of thoughts and ideas that typify my father as I know him. Most of these items are lessons he has lovingly imparted to me over the years. A few of them are simply ideas that I know he believes to be true.

Do the job right, or don't do it at all.

Saying you'll try is saying you're not going to do it at all; simply say you can.

Never say can't.

Be the best at what you do.

If you start it, finish it.

If you are productive, you will still have a job tomorrow.

Never spend your principal.

Life is not always fair.

Entomology and electrical engineering do go together (really!).

Take care of the land.

If you walk carefully and quietly, you will see more and damage less.

Shortcuts, however tempting, are bad science.

If you kill it, you eat it.

Things usually go on sale at double the price and a third off.

Trust in your father.

Don't trust anybody, not even your father.

Never throw anything away unless it's poisonous or on fire.

If it doesn't make sense, it's probably true.

There is no such thing as a free lunch.

Just because they say it's dangerous doesn't mean we shouldn't go there.

Family is the most important institution of all.

Seek out John Polhemus, and it is anyone's guess whether you will catch him with a collecting net, a fly rod, a hunting rifle or a bag of freshly harvested wild mushrooms in his hand (or possibly a combination of these). He is a man who has a passion for all things in nature, the things he holds most dear. If asked, he would undoubtedly reply that he prefers natural monuments to manmade ones, a tent to a hotel room and a tidal pool to a swimming pool. Rather than a set of golf clubs in his trunk you will find an aspirator, ethanol, nets, etc.

Standing in a Montana river, I watch as he casts 60 feet of fly line and delicately places a #20 caddis fly on the surface of the water next to the opposite bank. A fish

raises to the fly, but rolls away at the last moment. "See there!" he says, "that's how it's been all evening." Out into the stream he goes, scooping up for closer inspection the small flies that dot the water. Soon, he is sitting in his camp, carefully tying flies with the proper structure and coloration. The next evening I witness the harvest of some of the most beautiful rainbow trout the state of Montana has to offer. Entomology at work in sport.

I am a mechanical engineer by trade, not an entomologist. As such, my perceptions of my father's work take on a decidedly different caste from those of my brother and his fellow scientists. I have looked on with fascination during my entire life as he has pored over countless streams, springs and marshes in search of a quarry that I understand little about. I do, however, understand the importance of his work and the efforts of those like him. In a world filled with those that put profit above the planet, men like John Polhemus stand out like a sore thumb. While his fellow engineers at the Martin Marrietta corporation slaved to achieve middle management status, he spent three grueling years legitimizing an already well established career in bio-engineering through the pursuit of a doctoral degree at the University of Colorado. Even then, few seemed to take the venture seriously until it became painfully obvious that remote sensing data from orbital platforms had far reaching implications in the management of serious problems such as the control of tsetse fly and screw worm, and that somebody with a background in biology and engineering was needed to make those efforts a success. Entomology at work in engineering. Touchè.

"I'm going to be gone for about a week, and I need you to observe these live specimens while I'm gone. All you have to do is count the number of shed casings in each petri dish and verify that the specimen is still alive. Record the data in this book, okay?" With that, he was off to Houston, Texas or somewhere similar to meet with a NASA customer, leaving the small creatures in my charge. I was responsible. I was culpable. I suddenly wasn't sure that I was up to the rigors of scientific research. Having no choice, I rose to the occasion and performed my duties as instructed. Entomology at work in parenting. Hmm.

Recently, my wife Martha and I backpacked into a remote region in the Southeast corner of Colorado. During our little expedition, we happened upon a beautiful canyon hidden in the grasslands. As we sat in a stand of trees next to a small spring, I began to examine the selection of aquatic insects resident to the small pool and thought it a shame that I had no collecting equipment. Certainly I would have to bring my father here to sample the area's potential offerings. I was immediately overcome with the panicky realization that I was actually starting to view the world in entomological terms. I'm not sure how my mother would deal with the thought of her one final family refuge outside of that science being corrupted. No worries.

As I said in the beginning, I am very much like my father. I sought my advanced education late in life, I have a passion for the gifts of nature. I am fascinated by the scientific process, and I have no tolerance for any paradigm that puts money over conservation. If I am quite fortunate, I will someday have the opportunity to contribute to the world scientific community in his same tradition of perseverance and excellence. While there are those that will argue about the nuances of how to conduct research, I think that there will be few that can argue about the contributions that my father has made to science, and to his family. Efforts made not in the pursuit of self recognition, but in the interest of mankind. Thanks, dad.